

Press Release

Westford Bird Tests Positive for West Nile Virus

Last week the Westford Board of Health received notification from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) that a dead blue jay, discovered on Brian Drive, tested positive for the West Nile Virus (WNV). The disease is spread through infected mosquitoes. To date, 273 birds have been tested across the state and 75 were positive for WNV.

The MDPH also performs surveillance for Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), which is also spread through mosquitoes. Forty-five mosquito pools statewide tested positive for EEE.

Statistically five humans have tested positive for WNV and 4 human cases of EEE were reported in MA in 2005. None of the positive cases of either WNV or EEE have been Westford residents, however it is assumed to be present in an area when the mosquitoes or birds test positive.

West Nile Virus causes illness that varies from a mild fever to more serious disease like encephalitis or meningitis. Persons older than 50 years of age have a higher risk of developing severe illness. With EEE, inflammation and swelling of the brain is the most dangerous symptom.

Sandy Collins, Director of Health Care Services, stated, "It is important that residents take some simple and effective preventative measures to protect their families from mosquito-borne viruses including West Nile Virus and EEE. We are lucky that we are late in the season when the first frost should reduce the mosquito population. Surveillance has been ongoing and adulticide spraying has helped decrease the numbers of mosquitoes in Westford".

The Board of Health recommends that all residents follow these simple measures to reduce the chance of being infected:

Mosquito-Proof Your Home

Eliminate the places around your home where mosquitoes can lay their eggs by either draining or getting rid of items that hold water. These can include: rain gutters; drains; empty flowerpots; wading pools, and birdbaths. Keep mosquitoes out of your home by having screens on both windows and doors and repairing rips and tears.

Avoid Mosquito Bites

Mosquitoes bite most frequently during the hours from dusk to dawn. Take extra care to use repellent and protective clothing, especially during the evening and early morning hours. Consider avoiding outdoor activities during these times. When possible, wear

long-sleeves, long pants and socks when outdoors. The most effective repellents contain DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide), Picaridin (KBR 3023) or Permethrin. Always follow the instructions on the product label.

Be Informed

The Westford Board of Health has scheduled an educational session entitled **“Protect Your Family against Mosquito and Tick- Borne Diseases”** on October 26th from 7-9 pm at the Millennium School. Dr. David Sidebottom, an infectious disease specialist from Saints Memorial Hospital, will present the program and provide an opportunity for questions and answers. All members of the community are invited to attend.

Darren R. MacCaughey, Director of Environmental Services, stated that mosquito control and spraying in Westford is conducted through the Central Massachusetts Mosquito Control Project (CMMCP). “Due to lower temperatures at night, mosquito spraying ended with the last week of September. Surveillance of mosquito pools has been extended through this week but the numbers of mosquitoes found, trapped and sent for testing at the DPH Laboratory has been drastically reduced as lower nighttime temperatures are achieved.” For additional information on the CMMCP you may phone (508) 393-3055 or log on to their website: <http://www.cmmcp.org>

Full information on positive results can be obtained at the DPH’s website: <http://www.mass.gov/dph/wnv/wnv1.htm>